

---

## Jacques Andrieu, *Psychologie de Mao Tsé-toung* (The Psychology of Mao Tse-Tung)

Brussels, Editions Complexe, 2002, 95 p.

Jacques Seurre

---



### Édition électronique

URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/784>  
ISSN : 1996-4617

### Éditeur

Centre d'étude français sur la Chine contemporaine

### Édition imprimée

Date de publication : 1 décembre 2003  
ISSN : 2070-3449

### Référence électronique

Jacques Seurre, « Jacques Andrieu, *Psychologie de Mao Tsé-toung* (The Psychology of Mao Tse-Tung) », *China Perspectives* [En ligne], 50 | november- december 2003, mis en ligne le 20 avril 2007, consulté le 28 octobre 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/784>

---

Ce document a été généré automatiquement le 28 octobre 2019.

© All rights reserved

---

# Jacques Andrieu, *Psychologie de Mao Tsé-toung* (The Psychology of Mao Tse-Tung)

Brussels, Editions Complexe, 2002, 95 p.

Jacques Seurre

---

## NOTE DE L'ÉDITEUR

Translated from the French original by Peter Brown

- 1 A common thread of aggressive paranoia runs through the psychology of dictators, a thread associated in the period of their physical and intellectual decline with the loss of a sense of reality that produces the worst kinds of disasters. It had been known, especially since the publication of Dr Li Zhisui's memoirs, that Mao was no exception to the rule. But the work by Jacques Andrieu, *Psychologie de Mao Tse-Tung* (The Psychology of Mao Tse-Tung), has the merit of analysing one peculiarity of the neurotic personality of the Great Helmsman, his deep hatred of intellectuals, not only those opposed to him, but intellectuals per se.
- 2 Andrieu's argument is that this hatred arose out of the trauma that was school for the teenager from Shaoshan when, with the yoke on his back, he “went up” to Xiangxiang, and then to Changsha to study, and came up against both his classmates' contempt for “country bumpkins” and the discipline of the teachers. This entitles us to an analysis in the form of a pamphlet containing some very colourful turns of phrase (the Red Guards are characterised as “Mao Jugend”), and where carefully selected quotations from Chairman Mao make up a staggering collection of foolish sayings—“Since time immemorial, many great scholars and thinkers have not gone to University”. “The inventor of penicillin was a dry-cleaner (...). He collected a handful of earth in his colour vat, mixed it with who knows what and that was it”—brought about by an idée fixe, according to which teachers and intellectuals are vain and pernicious, whereas

great men are self-taught. Andrieu demonstrates how this idea was already present in 1917 in one of Mao's writings, *A Study of Physical Education*, which purports to show the nastiness of teachers and the suffering of bodies subject to rigid discipline in a school made to “ruin one's life”. For Mao, school was evil incarnate.

- 3 For the misfortune of China after 1927, Mao's frustration as an individual coincided with the failure of urban intellectuals to give birth to a country out of a revolution. It was the time of self-taught people from a rural background. It was *his* time. Already in 1942, in Yan'an, Mao no longer thought twice about opposing *laobaixing* and intellectuals as examples of virtue and vice. This obsession was to have its worst practical application in the 1960s. In 1964, Mao wrote: “the current examination methods are good for the enemy, not for the people (...). During exams, you have to let those sitting take a breather and even let their fellow students take over for them”. In 1968, he said that “We should do away with exams altogether, a point on which we have to be unshakeable”. This was the final stage in Mao's crazy intellectual-bashing, and Andrieu brilliantly shows how an initial phase of praising self-taught farm workers has turned into one of an absolute denigration of knowledge. The educated person could henceforth be absolved from his original sin—bookish knowledge—only by negation, that is by renouncing the latter. What was a call for elevated experience has given way to a levelling off.
- 4 Tyranny is the encounter of one individual's neurosis with the cultural and historical conditions that make it possible. Mao's hatred of intellectuals had its roots in and drew its energy from Chinese culture, which may be Confucian (*Junzi bu qi*, “a good man is not a utensil”; moral virtue is worth more than any particular expertise; people must be red before being expert). But it may also be legalistic (*Shi zhi zhe zhong, ze bai fa*, “When there are many people cultivating their knowledge, then the law is depraved”). Mao could have taken up as his own the maxim of the *Hanfeizi*, he who had boasted about having “burned books and had literate people buried alive even better than Qin Shi Huangdi did”). One would have welcomed some development by Andrieu of this aspect of the question, but such an omission can hardly be the object of serious reproach in this short and brilliant essay of under a hundred pages.